

Protestantism
THE
1878
PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE
RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES
OF THOSE COMMONLY CALLED
THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT PARTY,
AND OF
OTHER PRESBYTERIANS,
ESPECIALLY THOSE OF
THE SECESSION IN SCOTLAND;
ON THE
HEAD OF MAGISTRACY,
BRIEFLY STATED.

By a Member of the General Associate Synod.

Printed and Sold by J. GUTHRIE, *Edinburgh*; and
BRASH and REID, *Glasgow*.

®

THE
PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE
RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES
OF THOSE COMMONLY CALLED
THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT PARTY,
OTHER PRESBYTERIANS



THE QUESTION IN SCOTLAND;
ON THE

HEAD OF THE CHURCH

IN THE

OF THE CHURCH

OF THE CHURCH

OF THE CHURCH

OF THE CHURCH

THE DIFFERENCE, &c.

THERE are few subjects on which Christians have not need to be cautioned to avoid extremes on both hands. This is particularly needful in respect to the necessity of religious qualifications in civil rulers. While some are for banishing religion and all pertaining to it from the office or concern of Magistrates, others have erred on the other side, and have taught that scriptural qualifications are absolutely necessary to the lawful constitution of Magistracy; so that without these none can be made capable of exercising government, or have a claim to obedience, at least in lands where the Christian and Reformed Religion hath been publicly received and settled. But when rocks are on both sides, to steer the middle course is best, according to the old counsel, *In mediocritissimus ibis*.

It is well known that there is a small body of people, that have long had a good report for piety and strictness, who have not only dissented from the Revolution-Church of Scotland, but continued also to disown the civil government, because it was not framed at the Revolution altogether upon the covenanted plan of a preceding period. As this is a practical point, and as the mistakes about it are of hurtful consequence, and as they are recommended by the character of the men and covered with a mask of singular zeal and faithfulness, whereby some weak and unstable souls are in danger of being ensnared, it may not be amiss to set their principles in their true light. I mean not to make a formal reply to any of the writings in defence of these principles, which would infallibly lead us into a labyrinth of endless confusion, and oblige us often to encounter unmeaning

meaning jargon, and pay attention to sophistical quibbles, unworthy of notice. Let it suffice to touch a little the vitals of their scheme, that the intelligent reader may see how unsound it is. One would think that nothing more would be necessary than barely to understand it, in order to discern its manifold absurdities. I have often wondered at their leaders, not so much how they should be able to draw the people into the belief of their opinions, as how they could reason themselves into a firm belief of such paradoxical tenets. And it is to be wished, that they would narrowly reconsider the state of that controversy with other Presbyterians; especially with the Associate Synod, and fairly relinquish the points which cannot be maintained without a plain insult upon common sense, reason and scripture. Would they but open their eyes a little and reflect, the matter might soon be ended---and they may easily find that the foundation pillars on which they build are entirely rotten. If these be unsettled, the edifice must fall of course.

+ The great question between them and Seceders is briefly this: whether a due measure of scriptural and religious qualification be essential to the being of a Magistrate. Seceders grant that the possessing of these is necessary to the *bene esse*, or the better discharging of the magistratical office; but that they are essentially necessary to the *esse*, or being of it, so that it cannot be lawfully exercised where these are not, they deny. It may be granted, that Christianity, or religious qualifications according to the word of God, are essential to the *being* of a Christian Magistrate, if you refer being to Christianity in the Magistrate; and that is the same thing with saying, that without Christianity there can be no Christian; a proposition as plain as that two and three make five, which no man in his senses will debate with them. But if you refer *being* in the proposition to the office of Magistracy, which is the sense in which they must understand it, according to their principles, then it expresses quite a different thing. That is the same with saying, that there cannot be a Magistrate without he be a Christian, and that again is in effect to say, that there cannot be any civil relation,
or

or common offices, among men, without Christianity. For it is equally impossible that there can be a Christian husband, a Christian physician or philosopher, a Christian anything, without Christianity, or a due measure of scriptural qualifications, as that there can be a Christian Magistrate without them. Yet that the above relations, offices and characters derive their being from Christianity, or the revealed will of God, and that they cannot exist where that is not known, is a principle which they themselves will not admit. But that these may lawfully be without Christianity, and that Magistracy cannot, is something very hard to conceive. None can account for the distinction but by saying, that the being of Magistracy, and the being of Christianity in a man, are essentially the same, and thus to confound two things together that are entirely distinct.

Again, it is one thing to say, that scriptural, or religious qualifications according to the word of God and our Covenants, are essentially necessary to make one a Christian, a Protestant, a Presbyterian, or Covenanted Magistrate, and another to say, that such qualifications are essentially necessary to his being a Magistrate to Christians, Protestants, Presbyterians or Covenanters. For a person invested with a magistratical office, may be of one religion, and his people of another, and yet the relation be lawful and valid between them. There is no absurdity or inconsistency in saying, as Seceders do, that a man may be a lawful Magistrate to Christians, Protestants, Presbyterians, or Covenanters, while he is not himself a Christian, &c.—providing he answers the immediate end of his office, in maintaining peace, order, and justice in the common-wealth. Unless this principle be just, no Christian in Pagan, no Protestant in Popish, no Presbyterian in Prelatic lands, could at any time have acknowledged the civil Magistrate, even while they were the smaller part of these nations; as those professing the true religion frequently have been, and are, and always at first must be, before their religion become national.—And to deny this principle is to assert, that a perfect uniformity in religion is absolutely necessary to constitute any lawful relation between civil governors and subjects; and where that is wanting the power is void,

void, and obedience thereto for conscience sake no more due, a tenet big with absurdity and mischief, and directly repugnant to the words of our confession, "That infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the Magistrate's just power."

However let it be attended to, that the question is not, whether religion of some kind or other, that is, some impressions of a Divine Being and Providence, be essentially necessary to the character of a Magistrate. If this were the question, then it would be the same thing as to ask, whether religion, or a sense of a Deity, be essential to the being and preservation of society? or in other words, whether an absolute Atheist could be a Magistrate? About this Seceders never moved a doubt. For if religion be totally destroyed, then the foundations of civil government and all regular society are overturned. Such a being as is supposed in this question, could never be a Magistrate, for this plain reason, because he would be a monster rather than a man, whom no fetters or chains, however sacred, could bind. Seceders never dreamed, that any reasonable society, acting according to the moral dictates of right reason, would set up brutes or human monsters over them. The magistrates which they plead for subjection to, "are" to use their own words, "always supposed to be in the actual possession of such natural and ordinary abilities as may be competent for the discharge of their office." But as there is a law written in the heart, and a natural religion common to all, these impressions, or religious qualifications essential to Magistracy, must be common to all men too, and not peculiar to men of any one religious profession. As there is a sense of a Deity, reverence for an oath, regard to justice, &c. without the bible---so there may be a knowledge of magistratical duties, and a fitness for the office among those to whom the word of God never came. It has therefore its foundation in the light and law of nature, and not in the word, or law revealed. It is never denied, but that revelation explains and enforces the duties belonging to the office, and affords a clearer and more perfect light for the performance of them, as it doth with regard to every other duty of life, but this will not make it a scriptural institution, found-
ed

ed on the revealed will of God, as those I reason with foolishly assert. For at this rate, there would be no office, relation, or duty but would be scriptural, or instituted in his revealed will : there would be no natural principles of knowledge, no natural religion, or law of nature, distinct from revelation ; seeing these are unfolded more fully and perfectly in the Bible than any where else. Even that truth, "there is a God," could not be called natural, because the scriptures reveal it. This is plainly to maintain that the law and light of nature, and revelation, are the same.

If then, according to the true state of the question, this or that particular profession of religion be essential to the office of a lawful Magistrate, as the party we reason with maintain, it would necessarily follow, that no nation could even agree in constituting or acknowledging one common civil head, unless they were also agreed in the same specific profession of religion ; but there would be as many civil communities created, as there are religious societies : every one of the latter, though a minority of a nation, would consider themselves under a necessity of making choice of one of their own religion, to whom they may exclusively render the tribute of obedience and honour, or else be destitute of a form of civil government altogether, which the state of no people can long allow, and which would amount to a rejection of an ordinance of God, which that party disclaim, as a calumnious charge against them. But it is hard to say, whether the total want of government, or attempts to settle it, in the manner and in the circumstances above supposed, would be most prejudicial to the safety and peace of mankind. Could ever civil government be settled or subsist in order and peace, if they were to be thus multiplied among a people in proportion to their religious distinctions ? On this plan, in Judea, in the time of the Apostles, there should have been a Christian governor, as well as a Jewish or Roman ; in Rome afterwards a Christian, as well as a Pagan, emperor. In Britain there should be, at present, not only a prelatie king for those of his own religion, but also a popish king, a Presbyterian, an Independent king ; a Cameronian king, a Quaker king, *cum multis aliis.* Thus
instead

instead of uniting together in any common measures as one civil body, for the preservation of their lives and properties, such a people would in reality be so many lesser and distinct nations intermixed, and like individuals in the hostile state of nature, every one of them preying upon another, as the fishes of the sea, and the greater eating up the lesser; to prevent which, is the very end of civil government. If the principle be good, and every one were to act upon it under that view, what would be done in prosecution of it, would be accounted morally right. And thus these multifarious governments, this multitude of kings, would necessarily be held not merely as providential, but moral powers. Thus we would have many kings, not only *de facto*, but *de jure*.

May not these principles be justly considered as inimical to government? If they were true, then Christ's kingdom would indeed be of this world, and his servants would fight. Those men who drew the sword for the active support of their testimony, seem to have gone truly into the spirit of them. That frantic Hero, who some time ago, we are told, proceeded so far as to plan his little religious commonwealth---and dared to declare open war, both by sea and land, against King George and all his adherents, was perhaps the only person who ever had the resolution to act fully up to their principles.

But to return, if the above principles were true, namely, that any particular profession of religion were essential to the being of a lawful Magistrate, then it would follow, that upon every change of religion, there must, of necessity, also be a change of the Magistrate. A nation could not at any time change their confession of faith, or their system of worship, or church discipline, without the co-operation of civil rulers, without setting up a new civil head over them. For the Magistrate who should still adhere to the old religion, and had not yet adopted the new profession, must all at once forfeit his right to reign, however excellent a prince he may otherwise be, and however amply he may protect and secure his subjects, not only in the enjoyment of their civil, but religious, liberties. And upon this principle,
even

even the minor part of a nation, when reforming or reformed, could not continue their obedience to the Magistrate unreformed. For if dominion be thus essentially connected with some particular mode or profession of religion, then undoubtedly the *jus* or right to reign, must always follow the justness and goodness of the religious profession, which being founded in Divine institution must be one. The reforming few, therefore, by virtue of the superior goodness or purity of their religious profession, must enjoy the whole right of government among themselves. For the civil head, through the want of that which is supposed essential to the office, must lose all claim, to the exercise of power, or rather he never had it, and all others destitute of that main qualification must be ineligible. The body politic too must be without all right to the advantages of government. In which case the forfeit must devolve wholly into the hands of the professors of the true religion, and they alone ought to enjoy it : and thus they will be not only the true church, but the only body politic. This is nothing else than the absurd doctrine, " that dominion is founded in grace ;"---that Magistracy is an ordinance given to the church as such, and that it is radically lodged in the hands of the saints, at least these who are visibly such, and restricted to them.

The distinction our opponents make use of to evade the glaring evidence of truth, here, is altogether unavailing. They distinguish in respect of times, places, and circumstances;--and between lands never reformed, and such as have been once reformed, and have again apostatized. But if they would recollect the state of the question, and consider the plain meaning of the terms put into it, they would be ashamed to mention this. The difference of circumstances as to a nation's having never been reformed, or the contrary, cannot alter the case. The question is about the very being of Magistracy ; and circumstances, according to any right use of language, can never possibly affect the being of any thing, one way or other. † Whatever is essential to the being of a thing, must be so in all times, in all places, and in all supposable circumstances. Take away what is essential from a thing, or add what destroys

its being, and its being is of course destroyed. If the want of scriptural and religious qualifications destroy the being of Magistracy in the once covenanting land of Britain, the want of them must have the same effect in France, Russia, or Japan,—unless Magistracy be some strange monstrous composition, made up of as many beings or essences, as there are modifications in religion, or supposable variations, with regard to it, in different times and places. If so, it might have a being to lose, and a being, or beings notwithstanding preserved; and then it might be said, that a thing may lose its being, and preserve its being; or which is the same thing, “that a thing may be, and not be, at the same time;” which hath been hitherto reckoned an impossibility.

Unity hath, by all philosophic and accurate minds, been considered as a property necessarily belonging to a Being. *Omne Ens est unum*. But these men, in their testimony and reasonings about Magistracy, instead of taking it up as something simple and unalterable in its nature, they suppose, that it may be one thing, in one place, or time, and quite different, in another. Accordingly they speak, however absurdly, as if that thing called Magistracy, had a Heathen being, and a Christian being, a Popish and a Protestant being, a Prelatic and a Covenanted being; not adverting that it must be essentially the same, whether among Heathens or Christians;—among reformed and unreformed;—and whatever is separable from it among any of them can never be essential to its being any where. These absurdities they plunge themselves into by not distinguishing between Paganism, Christianity, Popery, Prelacy, &c. in a Magistrate, and the office itself which he exercises; for these are things entirely distinct. So any of the above mentioned religious qualifications are as separable from the being of Magistracy, as a black or brown coat is from the body of a man. They by no means found the title to or fitness for the office; but are essentially requisite, only, to the Magistrate's being called a Pagan, a Christian, &c.

Farther, let it be attended to, that the question is not, whether the Magistrate ought to be of the best, or the true reformed religion, and whether he should in his place
and

and station protect and promote it? Nor is it questioned, but that a Magistrate's being of the purest religion, and professing a due measure of religious qualifications according to the word of God, may be necessary to the better exercise of the office, for the glory of God, and the good of the people, especially a people who are themselves of the purest religion?—For this all our Presbyterian fathers held, and this Seceders grant, and plead for as much as they. They do not look upon it as a matter of indifference, what Magistrate a Christian and reformed people set over them, as to his religion, when the whole extent of his office, and the various useful purposes for which it may be employed are taken into account. This they consider as of very great moment, and what should be carefully provided for bylaws, in the admission of any to places of power and trust, supreme or subordinate. Accordingly they approve of the laws made and qualifications required of Magistrates in the last reformation, and bear testimony against church and state, in deviating from them. They reckon it a great unhappiness, that Britain and Ireland have not Magistrates, in every respect, such as the word of God, our Covenants, and the Reformation-laws of the kingdom require. But, at the same time, they have well distinguished, between the office itself and the qualifications essential thereto, and those which are only requisite to the better and more perfect exercise of it. The last may be wanting, when the first remains; as in all other offices and relations among men. It surely is not advisable to reject a present and necessary good, because it may not be the best of its kind, or good in the highest degree. Especially as servants of every kind are expressly enjoined, *to be subject to their masters, with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.* If we withhold our tribute, our subjection, and fear, till we meet with a Magistrate, in every respect, according to God's own heart, we will never meet with one worthy to receive it. A perfect Magistrate is as hard to be found on earth as a perfect man.—We are not warranted to despise or reject any good, because of some defect accompanying it. Government is a blessing without which the world would become a scene of violence.

violence and wild disorder. It must be a very bad government indeed which is worse than none. The best of them have flaws and imperfections, but are we on that account to refuse the blessing, and condemn the ordinance of God? The present government is an unspeakable blessing to these nations. As such we acknowledge it, support, and pray for it. And yet this doth not hinder us to acknowledge, and wish that it may become still more so. It has its defects and corruptions which need to be reformed. It ever had, and ever will have them, though they may be in very different degrees. But is there no way of curing a rent, or removing a rotten beam without pulling down the building. Better it should stand, though somewhat crazy and deformed, than bury all in its ruins.--Subjection to the present government cannot lawfully be refused, by a few, unless it can be shewn to be worse than none. And this no man in his sober senses will attempt.

It is undoubtedly the right of a people to provide, that the Magistrates they set over them be of the true reformed religion, as well as themselves; for they are bound to provide for the right exercise of the office among them, and that the institution be maintained in the best and most perfect manner. But should a people fall from reformation, once attained to in this matter, and dispense with the want of some useful and good qualifications, their omission, or defection, however culpable, doth not affect the authority of the Magistrate thus constituted. He may notwithstanding this be a moral power, ordained of God, having a claim to all reasonable obedience. The constitution of a Magistrate is a morally good action, though there may be heinous faults, failures and mistakes accompanying it. Those whose business it is to elect Magistrates, and settle the civil constitution, whether they be many or few, are indeed responsible for the faults or failures accompanying the action; others whose immediate right it is not, or who may be excluded from the exercise of their right, are only in their stations to avoid participation in these faults; and while they bear testimony, are bound to obey. They are to be subject to these ordinances of men, for the Lord's sake, in all things good and lawful, which they may

may certainly be without being chargeable with the faults and miscarriages of those who set them up. If this were impossible, then men could never act safely or innocently, in any relative station or connection with sinful men.

All the arguments used by these enemies to the present government, conclude only in fixing guilt on the body politic for violating sacred bonds, deeds and laws, without being able to prove that the Magistrate's exercise of the power towards its proper end is evil, or that those are guilty who yield subjection to it in so far as thus exercised; while they are neither directly nor indirectly approving of the public perjury, or defection but in their stations testifying against it.—The omissions, sins and miscarriages of the electors, and the want of any due requisites in present Magistrates gives indeed just occasion, and continues a sufficient ground, for all the friends of reformation to state a testimony upon that head;—but can never warrant a testimony of such a nature as to destroy the the civil power altogether, and dissolve the body politic. To testify against the want in the Magistrate, and the public sin of the people, in the way of owning the civil authority in lawful things, is every man's duty: For hereby a testimony only is given against what is blameable—which is to direct a testimony precisely to its proper object. But a testimony disclaiming subjection to government altogether must be wrong: For this is to direct it equally against what is good, and what is evil. Seceders in this respect, have been careful to confine their testimony to what is a proper object of it, namely, against what is unlawful in the present constitution and government; while they reckon themselves as much bound by the word of God, and the authority of our Lord Jesus, to respect what is good in it;—as civil Magistrates, and their lawful commands, undoubtedly are. And thus they keep free of that dangerous error, of mixing light and darkness, good and evil together, and bringing both under the same condemnation:—while their opposers are trampling upon one of God's ordinances altogether under pretext of testifying for the purity of it.

Our

Our adversaries unaccountably suppose, that there is no consistency between an adherence to the laws and deeds of settlement in last reformation, and submitting to a government constituted on a different footing;—and scruple not to maintain, that the sin of the nation in establishing it in opposition to these morally binding laws, overturns the foundation of our duty, in reference to that government, and absolves every man from allegiance. A position that approaches too near to the odious morality of Jesuits—that faith is not to be kept with heretics. A position more loose and extravagant perhaps was never taught by the disciples of Loyola. Granting all that is said of the apostacy and iniquity of the nation in this matter to be just, yet it doth not follow, that an office just, warrantable, and absolutely necessary in itself, can be invalidated by some circumstances of sinful mismanagement in the bestowing, receiving or exercising it. When a relation lawful in itself is constituted by those whose proper right it is, and when that which is essential to any office is not wanting, all are obliged to sustain them as valid. This is a principle men act upon every day in ordinary civil life.—I may be allowed for once to use a similitude or two, to make the case plain to the meanest capacity. I shall suppose that parents and guardians bind a young man while in minority, before he has a right of choosing for himself, an apprentice to a vicious or irreligious master, would this fault in his parents or guardians be a sufficient reason for him to break his indenture, and run away from his master?—Or if a person were baptized according to the form of the church of England, by the sign of the cross, though this be not a pure dispensation of the ordinance, will any say, that the baptism would be invalid, and that he must be re-baptized before he could be admitted a member of a Presbyterian church? Or if a man should marry a wife clandestinely, contrary to the good order established by church and state; would he be obliged on this account to put her away? And could not their friends sufficiently testify their hatred of the sinful manner and circumstances of the marriage, without declaring it to be of no force?—Or, to come still nearer to the circumstances of the case, I shall suppose

suppose, that a professor of the reformed religion, makes a solemn vow to observe it all his life-time, and that he will never marry an enemy to it, that neither he nor his posterity may hereby be in danger of relinquishing that good profession, and yet after this turns apostate, suppose to Popery, Mahumedanism, or Judaism—and notwithstanding of a vow morally binding contracts a matrimonial alliance with a Papist, Mahummedan, or Jewels: here there would be a relation lawful, and morally binding, though unlawfully made. Though the marriage could not be without apostacy and perjury, yet it would be as valid as if it had been otherwise contracted. The children, in that case, would be bound to filial subjection and obedience, as much as if the relation had been made up in the most unexceptionable manner. And it would be ridiculous to say, that their owning them in the character of parents, and subjecting to them in lawful things, would be an approbation of the father's perjury and apostacy. The application of those instances to the matter in hand is very easy. Our forefathers entered into a solemn Covenant and Oath for the advancing and maintaining reformation, and for the greater security thereof in all times coming, provided that no king should be admitted to the throne, and none should fill the places of power and trust, without first engaging to promote and maintain that cause. But worst times succeeding, and a Prince through unparalleled hypocrisy and deceit, getting into the throne, these bonds, with heaven-daring impiety, were burst asunder, and cast away. After the sad effects of this had been long and severely felt, and matters still proceeding to a farther extremity, Britain looked round for a deliverer. A mutual covenant was forthwith entered into between King William and these kingdoms, wherein many of the grievances prevailing in the late reigns were redressed; but still the covenant engagements and reformation acts were forgotten, and left out of the deeds of the settlement. Religion was established in England and Scotland, as it had been from the time of the first reformation, overlooking what was peculiar to the last covenanted reformation as if it had never been. As that was a memorable work of God, they so far sinned in this:

But

But the covenant between them as king and subjects, was not the less lawful or valid on that account : as it was entered into by the nation as such, whose proper right it was, even the most hearty friends of that reformation are bound to submit. The covenant of allegiance entered into by the nation, formerly with the Prince of Orange, and since with the family of Hanover, binds the conscience of every one born members of the commonwealth, not in opposition to any thing morally binding from the law of God, as the covenants are granted to be ; — but it binds to the plain and indispensable duty of obedience and subjection to these rulers, in all lawful things. While it cannot make void the obligations we are under to any duty from the word of God, or our religious covenants, it necessarily obliges and restricts us to obey, “ according to the word of God, and our covenants ; ” and such as refuse cannot in so doing act conform to either. And obedience thus limited and regulated, is the only obedience for which Seceders plead. Thus far they carry their professions of loyalty, and no farther. If obedience to Magistrates be a moral duty, it must be obligatory on the present friends of reformation, or it is not. If it is not, let it be shewn by what law of God or men they are exempted — or how their testimony can absolve them from a moral duty, which every other person besides is obliged to. If it is, then certainly this obedience must be given to some persons ; for any powers entitled to any duty must be powers that be, or persons actually invested with power. And if it must be given to persons, then it must be either to those whom the nation acknowledges as Magistrates, or it must be to some persons set up by others, or among themselves. The last cannot be, without making void the relation between the nation and their Magistrates, which the dissent or negative voice of a few can never do, unless they claim all the right and all the power into their own hands, competent to the whole body politic. The dissent of those who style themselves the reformed Presbytery, or of the whole Secession body, in this matter, could be of no more force to annul that relation, than the dissent of a minor from the deed of his guardians in the legal management of his estate. Wherefore as
obedience

obedience must be given, not to Magistracy in the abstract, but to Magistrates, or the powers that be.—and as there are none who can claim that title but the present rulers acknowledged by the nation, it must follow, these are the only persons to whom it can be given. These therefore at present are our scriptural, and let me add, in some sense, our covenanted Magistrates. For these, and none other, are the persons, with reference to whom the Holy Ghost in scripture gives at present to us, so many precepts and injunctions: and these are the persons which the oath of fidelity in our covenants, so far as it contains a matter of general obligation relating to the discharge of moral relative duties, and so far as it is still applicable to times and circumstances so very different, may also at present be said to respect. No clauses of that kind can, in consistency with common sense, be viewed as including any civil or direct oath of allegiance to the persons of present governors, or to their existing government complexly taken, or to any other, but by recognizing these, or entering into similar religious engagements, the moral duty arising from such a relation is acknowledged, and applied to such as continue in the providence of God to sustain it, but still with the limitations annexed, and above expressed. The word of God and our covenants lay no new foundation of Magistracy, make nothing essential to the being of a moral power, but what was so before; fix no new or peculiar channel for the conveyance of such a power, but what is known and practised according to the law of nature and nations. When the word of God commands to honour a father, to fear a master, to love a husband or wife, &c. None can know whom these precepts respect till these relations are made up, each in its proper manner, according to the course and circumstances of Providence, whether it be by generation, choice, express contract, or tacit consent. And when they are so constituted, these duties are to be performed to these very persons respectively sustaining them, and that according to the preceptive will of God. Such relations can at no time be thus providentially contracted, but they must, at the same time, be preceptive, infering a moral obligation from the law of God, yet is

C

not

not Providence made the foundation of moral obligation, or the rule of duty, but is to be considered as the criterion or mark determining the particular and practical application of the rule. And this is what Seceders mean when they declare that Magistracy is solely by the preceptive will of God, and that the distinction between a providential and preceptive Magistrate is absurd, about which the presbytery, called Reformed, make such long and ridiculous work in the supplement to their testimony.

If the mode of investing rulers with power in Britain be lawful; and if those things essentially requisite to constitute a moral power of this kind, be found in the deeds and acts of constitution and investiture, those who are thus constituted, are the powers ordained of God: None can at any time in this way be the ordinance of man, without being the ordinance of God. If they have been appointed according to such methods and forms as have been formerly approved and used in like cases, and if they have entered by a door which the light and law of nature points out, then must their power be of God, and their constitution according to his revealed will also; unless we suppose, that any thing done according to the light of nature, or the moral dictates of right reason, can be contrary to the will of God revealed in the scriptures. If what is essential to the office, or the being of the power, be found, according to the nature of it, which is purely civil, then the want of such qualifications as are properly religious, which have been required only for the greater perfection of the institution, cannot make it void; unless the body politic agree, and so long as they agree, to establish a different constitution.

Our opponents grant, that the Lord has lodged a power and right in the people of choosing those persons that shall exercise civil government over them, but they say, that while he has lodged this power in them of conveying the right of civil authority to their Magistrates, he has at the same time given them positive and unalterable laws, according to which they are to proceed. It is very true, they have the law of nature and the rule of God's word for their direction is this part of their

their duty. But then their inference from this is most absurd—that if their acts of election or deeds of constitution be not in every respect conform to the rule given them, then they can be of no force or validity in so far as they are right, but that the smallest failure or defect as to any thing required, makes the power conferred null to all intents and purposes;—That no real relation takes place in consequence of such an election, or deed of constitution, and that no duties can result from it. This is to say, that there can be no power acknowledged as a moral power, but what is perfect, or that we can never be laid under any obligation to obey, even in lawful commands, a defective and sinful Magistrate, appointed by a sinful people: It is to say, that there is nothing good in any action, if it be not absolutely and universally good. We must do nothing required, because we cannot do all that is required. What sort of doctrine is this, for beings who in every thing offend, and come short of the glory of God? According to it, no action could be called good, even in reference to human society—no moral relation created—no power moral, upon the face of the earth.

It is very true, that so far as the sinful failure and defect goes, or in so far as the corruption of man enters into any of their acts or ordinances, so far they cease to be good, and in so far they do not bind. The supreme foundation of moral obligation lies in the law of God, and that law can never bind against itself: neither Magistrate, nor people can ever be invested with such a right or power as to set aside at pleasure the divine laws in any thing, or give them a negative over the Most High. But every failure or abuse annuls not the right and power in itself; there is anullity only in so far as it fails, or is abused; while what is essential to them is supposed to remain, we are not at liberty to disown and disclaim them, but only those things unlawful accompanying the exercise of them. A lawful right may be unlawfully used, and a moral power may command things immoral.

Seceders never pretend, that the deeds of settlement and constitution, or the acts of government, are morally binding, in those things wherein they contradict the word.

word of God and our covenant engagements; they grant anullity in these respects—but not in all others, even in things lawful and necessary.

Our adversaries are either so dull, or so obstinate, as not to understand them on this head, though the matter, one would think, is so plain as a child might see it. They, in this matter, cannot allow a right to do what is good, without acknowledging a right to do what is evil, and look upon it as impossible to consider a power as moral, or as deserving obedience in lawful commands, without acknowledging it likewise in things sinful. Hence arise all their charges against the Associate Synod, as if they were contemning and casting off the authority of God's word;—setting up the will of men above that of God! pleading in behalf of the apostacy and perjury of these nations; maintaining and supporting prelacy, and all the corruptions of government, &c. while the whole tenor of their testimony is directly in opposition to these evils. In the whole strain of our opponents reasoning they quite mistake the matter in debate, or they would not talk at such a rate.—Seceders have one thing in their eye, while they have quite another. They view the present civil government in no other light than as a *Prelatic* Constitution, keeping nothing in their eye besides the evil of prelacy, and other corruptions adhering to it, and those who exercise it: but they forget and overlook it as it is a *Civil* Constitution, wherein that necessary and beneficial ordinance of Magistracy is in its being preserved, and made effectual to its great and immediate end. This is the precise thing Seceders have in view, in reference to the present government, when they hold it to be a moral duty to submit to it, to pay tribute, or to defend and pray for it; while they allow prelacy to be as bad a thing as the Reformed Presbytery please to call it, bearing as express a testimony against that and like evils as they can do.

There is no need either for denying or extenuating the evils of the British government, in order to establish the obligation to limited obedience to it, while supported by the people at large. However important some of these evils be, that were from the beginning excepted against in the principles of Seceders, and though the
number

number of these may since, more especially of late, have increased to an alarming degree, yet the general argument is not hereby weakened. The number and degree of these evils do not affect the radical principle or ground of obedience, they only extend the exceptions and limitations of it: they enforce more strongly another duty, that of attempting the reformation of these, whether in constitution or administration, civil or ecclesiastic, by all classes of people in the nation, each in the manner competent to them.—Some, it must be granted, even of those who profess to hold to the principles of Seceders, have too often attempted to maintain the argument for subjection in this unfair way of denying or covering some of the glaring defects or abuses of that government, especially those who have undertaken the defence of oaths adopting without restriction present laws and deeds of settlement, even in reference to their religious profession. Others, again, by pronouncing laboured and boundless panegyric, and vague declamations upon the excellence of the British government, without discriminating the good from the evil, such as have lately been poured upon the public from pulpits and presses, have endeavoured to inculcate peaceable subjection and an undefined loyalty upon subjects, sometimes in opposition to any attempts at reforming abuses. This method is wrong and unsafe, while it rests the duty of obedience, solely or chiefly, upon the excellence of the constitution or administration, and either denies the necessity, or arraigns the lawfulness, of reform. This is to remove the main pillar of conscientious loyalty, and to substitute a false or dubious one in its place: among a people who may perceive very obvious abuses, or who may feel many sensible grievances, this mode of argumentation may have a tendency to weaken instead of strengthening sentiments of duty; for while they are not convinced of the truth of the premises, they may also doubt of the justness of the conclusion. In Seceders this is a more inexcusable error, and a plain inconsistency, as it represents their testimony on the head of national evils, and their pleadings for reformation as groundless and culpable, and as it tends to make dutiful subjection the same thing with unlimited approbation.

Indeed

Indeed the king is invested with an ecclesiastical supremacy in England, by the same laws which bestow on him the civil * ; but this can never make them really one, or bring then both under the same predicament in point of authority. This union is of man—and any law making or supporting it, being contrary to a Divine constitution, ought to have no authority on conscience. But the law of civil headship is a law confirmed by the supreme King, whose will it is, that there should be always some to represent him in that character ; and as such

* The writer of this was greatly surprized as well as sorry to see in a pamphlet, called “The Scripture-Loyalist,” published by one professing adherence to the Secession-testimony, this and some other instances of corruption in the British government, so flatly denied. Though the author in the main has done justice to the cause he defends, he has in these particulars given great advantage to his opponents. Whoever assumes in argument what is obviously false in fact, gives occasion to say, that the cause must rest on falsehood. He supposed that none who knew what the British constitution was, would have ventured to assert, “ That the British king hath no supremacy in the church, neither by the constitution, nor by usurpation.” Or “That the present civil government is not Erastian, *i. e.* hath no power by the constitution, nor by usurpation, to model the government of the church, as it pleases.” It would be affronting the learned reader, to offer to prove that the ecclesiastical supremacy in all its vigor, is still by laws and practice, made a principal prerogative of a British king:—That in the one kingdom the constitution is Erastian by law, in the other, it has in some degree been rendered so by frequent encroachments.

It is no less false and absurd to say, that “a Covenanted Reformation—was raised up again at the Revolution ;” that “the Coronation-oath is a political defence of the Confession of Faith and Covenants.”

Script. Loyal. 2d. Edit. p. 67. 68. 70. 61.

such we must receive it. Though Prelacy be again entwisted with our civil constitution, and secured by what men have made fundamental laws of the kingdom, yet it remains in its nature as distinct from it as ever it was. Though the feet of the great image be part of iron and part of clay, yet these different materials can never essentially unite, or inseparably adhere together;—"They shall not cleave one to another even as iron is not mixed with clay †." Though the corrupt branches were lopped off, yet might the stump of the tree remain in the earth; "as with a band of iron and brass." The whole hierarchy may be abolished by future reformation, and what is excellent in our civil constitution remain entire and unhurt, in the same manner as in last reformation, without destroying the rights and privileges of parliament—the liberties of the kingdom—or diminishing his Majesty's just power and greatness. For then the ecclesiastical and civil supremacy were in the same manner united, and Prelacy and its attendant evils as much authorised by the laws of the constitution, as they are at present. If such an union makes obedience now unlawful, by corrupting the vitals of civil government, the same cause must have produced the same effect in any former period. But the reformers of other times thought not so. They never dreamed that their obeying the civil Magistrate in things lawful, and maintaining his just power and greatness, were the same thing with approving of the ecclesiastical supremacy, and all the prelatical corruptions, when these were not expressly required as terms of allegiance—or that their loyalty was inconsistent with a faithful and zealous testimony for reformation.

I might have urged farther upon these people the native consequences of their scheme.—I might have shewn the import of what they call a Providential Magistrate, in opposition to a preceptive;—that he can be nothing else than an evil and curse permitted of God to punish the nations; and that he cannot have the least right to do any thing pertaining to the office—but is only permitted to act as a thief to steal, or a murderer to kill:—If so, for near a century back, the course of
justice

† Dan. ii 43.

justice has been wholly suspended ; what men call order has been disorder, what is law has been nothing but tyranny, violence, and robbery ;—all processes and decisions in civil causes, have been nothing but a pragmatical meddling without warrant, by those whom God never made rulers and judges ; all criminal trials and executions of thieves and murderers have been illegal, and an express breach of the sixth command, being done by private persons.—I might ask, if that express law of nature and revelation, “ whose sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed,” and such like, have been suspended ever since the Revolution ? If they have, then may the greatest malefactors roam at large, free from all fear and restraint of men. If they are not suspended, but morally in force as often as those crimes are known to be committed ; by whom can they be lawfully executed, unless by those expressly appointed in nations for the purpose ; and when both the appointment of such, and the acts they perform, are matters of justice and of Divine precept, how can they be merely matters of permission, as all sinful actions are ? If they act by no other right, than the mere permission of Providence, instead of encouraging and supporting them in those acts of justice, we ought to oppose them to the utmost of our power.

+ Is it not also required that every man bear witness to the truth, and swear to it when an oath is laid upon him by the judge, particularly in matters of moment wherein the name, property or life of our neighbours is concerned ? How shall those duties be fulfilled, if there are not now, nor have been for an hundred years back, any lawful courts of judicature, for trying causes, and ending of controversies. Must the above and such like duties, morally binding in every time and place, be omitted, perhaps for many centuries yet to come, or for ever, because we have not covenanting Magistrates ?

I might shew, that in their practice they are self-condemned ;—that it is impossible practically to maintain their principles ; but they must in many things acknowledge Cæsar’s superscription : That they themselves sit under the shadow of that government which they ungratefully disown and contemn ; and that what they

they say God has only permitted as a judgment is to them, as well as to all the nation, an unspeakable privilege. Every comfort in civil life is hereby secured to them under God, and flows to them through this channel. To this it is owing, that they can call any thing their own—that they have houses to live in, markets to buy or sell in, or presses from which they may revile and abuse their benefactors. Yea, as civil society must be previously set up, wherever there is a religious collected and protected, had it not been for the existence of such a society in these kingdoms, and moral powers therein, they could not have subsisted till now in the character of a church. Such judgments we ought daily to pray for, and be thankful for!

But I shall not further detain the reader, nor would I have dwelt so long on this subject, had it not been for the sake of some serious people, who may be willing to learn the truth, and from pity to those who may be entangled in such mistakes, and have been blindly led away, through a shew of zeal, to such an unscriptural and dangerous scheme. Care has been taken to avoid, and in some degree to remove, the darkness and ambiguity of words, and to make the leading points of difference, as plain and intelligible as possible. Let none say, after all, that their mistakes on this head are not great; that in the main, their testimony is the same with that of Seceders, while the points wherein they differ are of small importance. For though it be true, that they admit many parts of testimony denied by others, and there is little difference as to most of the public evils, yet the difference remaining is not small, while they have openly taken the field against a very precious and important part of truth. The matters in debate are no unnecessary speculative opinions, but such as deeply and immediately affect a Christian's daily life and practice. Many may not discern the full import or real tendency of their principles, but the scheme, with all its consequences, deserves the abhorrence of all, who want to keep a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man. A scheme that strikes at the root of civil society, that absolves men from moral duties, and sets

afide the mōst exprels precepts; a scheme that calls evil good, and good evil; that teaches men, to be irreverent and unjust to superiors, in denying them their dues; that makes men ungrateful for the favours and blessings of Providence; that holds that as innocent which the New Testament forbids under the pain of damnation; that denies the law of nature, or makes it to be something opposite to the revealed will of God; that maintains Magistracy to be given of God to the church as the holy ministry is, and that it has its foundation only in the word written: that confounds Christ's mediatorial and moral government, that would blend his church or embroil it with the kingdoms of men: that has a tendency to bring odium on reformation, as incompatible with public peace, and a subjection to civil institutions; that tends to waken jealousy, or procure civil punishments against religious reformers; a scheme, in a word, that is at variance with the common voice of reason, the plainest language of the Bible, the approved practice of the illustrious band of reformers and martyrs, in past times, and with the concurrent sentiments and uniform example of all the churches of Christ;—such a scheme surely can never be justly accounted harmless, nor ought the danger resulting from it ever to be reckoned small. Every person certainly should very seriously consider it, before he either embraces, or speaks of it as intitled to any encouragement, or extenuating apology.

We intend not, by any thing that is said, the least disrespect to the persons who have patronized or followed this way: we doubt not but they have done so in the sincerity of their heart, under the clouds of misapprehension. We wish not to impute to them any consequences of their scheme which they have disavowed, or practices which they have disapproved; much less to expose them to the severity or resentment of a jealous administration for their opinions, while peaceably deporting themselves. We desire only, that desisting from the art of wrangling, they would be open to information, candid in reviewing and confessing an error; and in so doing unite themselves, in maintaining the testimony for Presbyterian Covenanted Reformation, with
the

the few friends of it that remain, in these degenerate and wretched times.

POSTSCRIPT.

THOSE who would attempt, with any probable hope of success, a re-union of discordant parties of Christians, ought to begin by an exact view and statement of the chief points of difference, and by reducing their number as much as possible; for while these are not duly attended to, Disputants may wander, and long contend in vain, about some subordinate points, or consequences. The neglect of this also gives rise to many injurious misrepresentations. As it is the duty of every Christian to know well the articles of his own religious profession, so charity and justice to others require him also to be duly informed as to the real sentiments and schemes of those who differ from him, lest in speaking or acting towards them, he would load them with false charges. This obligation lies especially upon those in public stations, and it belongs no less to those in secular professions, and in public offices in the state, than to those in ecclesiastical character, when they take upon them to represent the principles or proceedings of any religious body in reference to government and the peace of society; lest they should do them a real injury, and at the same time expose their own ignorance of the subject.

When a petition was presented, some time ago, from a number of Presbyterians in London, most of them from Scotland, and connected with the Secession, to the British Parliament, for relief, from the necessity of swearing by kissing the gospels, it gave concern to some to see the Lord Chancellor (Thurlow) mistaking so far the character and principles of the Petitioners and those of their connection, as, in his speech upon their Bill in the House of Peers, however favourable to their requisition, to represent them as the same with the people usually designed CAMERONIANS, who scrupled to own the authority of King William, and the government at the Revolution. The substance of the speech, bearing in it that false accusation, was afterwards

wards published. To this gross blunder, perhaps, the awkward and unmeaning designation assumed by the Petitioners (as belonging TO THE ANCIENT KIRK OF SCOTLAND) though objected to, and ordered to be corrected in a meeting of a committee on that business, at London, in which the writer of this was present—might contribute. Yet such rash and unfounded descriptions of a body of people, whose principles had long been publicly known, in this kingdom, can scarcely be excused in a learned Lord of such high and decisive authority. It is little to the credit of many of the *modern learned or great*, that they should be better acquainted with the different casts of Hindoos or Gentoos, or the various sects of Mussulmen, than with the real sentiments, character, or history of numerous bodies of Christians, living in the same time and country with themselves. If calumnious misrepresentations ought at all times to be avoided, in the midst of political divisions, and public ferment, there is need of double caution on that head.

F I N I S.

1 JA 64

E R R A T A.

Page	Line
4	2, read <i>qualifications</i> .
7	24, for <i>may</i> read <i>might</i> .
11	3, for <i>professing</i> read <i>possessing</i> .
21	7, after <i>these</i> read <i>evils</i> .

n
n
e.
f
a,
d
o
y
of
n,
f
d
n-
of
of